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For Immediate release
November 9, 2004

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**STATE OF VERMONT
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

MEDIA RELEASE

**STATE OFFICIALS RESPOND
TO SHELBURNE NRP ISSUES**

Montpelier, VT – DPS Commissioner David O'Brien, and Commissioner of Health Paul Jarris today responded to a Shelburne group's press conference urging burial of the Northwest Reliability Project (NRP) in the Shelburne-Charlotte corridor.

"The NRP is one of the most significant projects the Public Service Board has ever considered. DPS and the Department of Health have devoted extraordinary time and resources to meeting our charge to represent and balance the sometimes competing interests of all Vermonters through exhaustive research and the help of experts respected in their fields," said O'Brien. "We have been guided by a commitment to achieving electric reliability at the least cost to ratepayers that still protects the needs and interests of the people directly impacted by the NRP. I understand some Shelburne area residents do not agree with the position we have taken, but in stating their case, today's announcement and petition misrepresents some key facts. I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight."

Representing the public interest: "The Department must represent the interests of all ratepayers, carefully balancing individual and collective interests. In this case that balance involves a whole range of issues including reliable electricity, cost to ratepayers, community needs, and aesthetic and environmental impacts. The PSB process provides the opportunity for individuals who feel the collective interest doesn't give their concerns adequate weight to come forward on their own behalf, which many individuals and groups have done," said O'Brien.

Public involvement: "Issues like the NRP have been given by the legislature to the PSB to decide precisely because they involve very complex questions and sharply competing interests," O'Brien said. "In this case, the Board has created an unprecedented number and range of opportunities for public input to ensure that everyone who may be affected by the NRP has a voice." The process has included numerous public hearings and hundreds of public comments. Although the process is formal for parties who are represented by counsel, parties who are not represented are appearing and making their concerns part of the formal record. Many other

individuals are participating through advocacy organizations and associations. The Board took great pains to give every interested person a chance to seek intervention at the earliest stages of case. "DPS has encouraged broad public notice and supported participation in the proceedings, even to the point of asking the Board reconsider denials of intervention requests. Some Charlotte residents who did not participate earlier now want to revisit basic issues that have already been heard in the case. While the Board has not agreed to go back to these earlier issues, the Charlotte group is being given an opportunity to participate on issues that affect them directly."

Health & safety: "The Department of Health witnesses in the NRP brought excellent qualifications to the task. One is a certified health physicist and the other a public administrator with more than 15 years experience in senior leadership in Vermont health and human services," said Dr. Paul Jarris, Vermont Commissioner of Health.

The Health Department's assessment included an extensive review of over 100 scientific articles and studies on the state of current knowledge regarding electromagnetic fields. Based on that review, the department found insufficient evidence to establish any cause and effect relationship between EMF exposure and adverse health effects. VDH evaluated the EMF impact using the only known health-based standard that exists, and reaffirmed the state policy of prudent avoidance.

Aesthetic impacts: "The DPS has been consistent throughout the case: due to the extremely high cost of a reliable underground design relative to overhead construction, undergrounding for aesthetic reasons is appropriate only as a last resort. DPS's aesthetics witness found undergrounding largely unnecessary because the aesthetic impacts of overhead lines can be adequately mitigated in virtually all instances. In the most recent phase of the NRP, DPS's aesthetics expert concluded that undergrounding may be necessary in the vicinity of Ferry Road in Charlotte, although it is possible that some overhead option that has not yet been offered could be adequate. We support undergrounding when and it is the only appropriate alternative because the added cost to construct a reliable underground segment is substantial," said O'Brien.

Economic impact: DPS presented testimony that the NRP will provide an economic benefit to the state by providing reliable electric service at the lowest cost. No witness presented evidence of adverse economic impact. The real economic threat would be the failure to provide reliable transmission for northwestern Vermont.

Tourism impact: "DPS considered the impact on tourism thorough our testimony on aesthetics. No witness in the case has given evidence of any negative tourism impact. More significantly, we have recommended extensive efforts where lines are visible to improve aesthetics by using alternative structure configurations, relocating proposed and existing lines, shorter poles, longer spans, plantings, reduced right-of-way clearing, and retention of existing vegetation to screen the poles and wires and to improve the harmony of the project with surroundings." The Department's aesthetic consultant concluded that the NRP's visibility from Shelburne Farms and Museum will not be as significant as claimed by those opposing the project and can be adequately mitigated. "The lines are half a mile or more away from the primary tourist site in the area, the Shelburne Museum," said O'Brien. While they can be seen from the museum, they are not necessarily discordant with the setting as powerlines are everywhere in our society; powerlines exist in this part of the NRP corridor now.

The cost of burying the lines: "DPS's witness on undergrounding, Jay Williams, is considered one of the foremost US experts on the design of underground transmission facilities," said O'Brien. "His advice and testimony support the need for stringent measures to ensure reliability where aesthetics may dictate underground construction for short stretches. The Shelburne group's low construction cost projections contain highly speculative costs for securing right of way and propose a design for undergrounding that does not provide adequate reliability. With a reliable design, including four 'phases' and adequate cable size, the additional cost of the eight miles of undergrounding suggested for the Charlotte to Shelburne corridor alone could be as high as \$20 million. Other towns also seek to bury sections of the proposed lines. If all these undergrounding requests were granted, the cost of undergrounding could add \$40 million or more to a project that is expected otherwise to cost Vermonters about \$12 million. These costs would be borne by all Vermont ratepayers, an expense that is not in the public interest because a less expensive appropriate alternative exists."

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